

THE INTENTION IMPERATIVE

TEN TOOLS FOR INSPIRATION

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Of course, the goal is to find that inspiration that moves others, not only you. I need to be clear here. In the examples used thus far I have been able to show how companies have distilled inspiration down to a single purpose or phrase. But that gives a false impression that you must find a single purpose or phrase in order to inspire. This isn't the case—and hasn't been my experience. There is a thing called inspirational leadership, in which the leader is able to inspire without resorting to an idea or purpose. We find obvious examples of this type of leadership from military history, where the great generals of ages long gone were able to inspire their troops to superhuman feats and incredible displays of loyalty. In recent memory, we have also seen it in coaches, the greatest ones being those who are able, day in and day out, to get the most out of their players through inspiration. While a military leader might be able to point toward noble ends—the elimination of tyranny, the pursuit of liberty—a coach is left with little more than his players' competitive spirit. Yet that's enough for the best coaches to get just that tiny ounce of extra effort to win the day.

Inspiration doesn't have to be mysterious or complicated to create. What follows are tools used by the leaders I've worked with for over thirty years, as well as those profiled in this book:

1. Connection: All the leaders profiled in this book share the common characteristic of being highly visible and accessible to those they lead. No exceptions. Connection is more than visibility and accessibility. It requires the effort to spend time with those on your team without having an agenda. That opens the opportunity for deeper-level conversations, questions, and even mentoring. As Fritz Holding of Noble Oil told me: "To inspire others I tell hard truths when necessary to trigger positive action/reaction. Tell people about possible outcomes that can benefit them [and] the company, and ultimately improve the lives of others around them."

2. Example: If you are an inspired leader, your visibility will go far in inspiring others. Spouting bromides and acting like a bad game-show host isn't inspirational; it's cheesy. The key elements to a leader's example are:

- courage—taking a stand and doing the right thing even when it is costly;
- authenticity—being who you appear to be without pretense or arrogance;
- commitment—investing your energy in your work, the success of the organization, and the success of others; and
- behavior—what you spend your time doing, not just talking about.

3. Integrity: Integrity, as I define it, is the distance between your lips and your life. Disillusionment in our culture is high due to many high-profile leaders whose exposed behavior has proven them to be . . . well, jerks. Unfortunately, even the best leaders are suspect according to the cynics. Authenticity and integrity should never be in conflict.

4. Understanding: One thing that motivation and inspiration share is specificity. Different people are inspired by different things in different ways. According to Gallup research, the odds of employees being engaged are 73 percent when an organization's leadership focuses on the strengths of its employees versus 9 percent when they do not. Increasing engagement is about understanding the strengths of those you lead. It is also

about understanding at an emotional level what matters to team members and how they feel. That is the understanding that comes from empathy.

5. Purpose: Pointlessness is wasteful, demoralizing, and the antithesis of inspiration. The purpose of the organization needs to be linked to every employee and every job. Linking the lower-level work to the higher-level purpose is one of the most powerful tools a leader has.

6. Education: Education has the ability to impact and shape lives. It can alert an employee to opportunity. It can draw out things the employee didn't even know they knew. It can provide insights that might have been missed. And it enlarges their capacity to contribute and produce. All those benefits are inspirational.

7. Challenge: The best leaders challenge employees to become more than they are. They recognize legitimate potential and help employees pursue it. Leaders can inspire by raising the expectations they have of those they lead.

8. Culture: Inspiration means to be "in spirit." In the world of work, you are in spirit with your culture. A healthy culture inspires. A dysfunctional culture impairs even the most inspired employee.

9. Appreciation: Appreciation is more than a leadership tool; it is a fundamental human need. I've yet to meet anyone in my work who feels "overappreciated." However, appreciation needs to be more active than a simple thanks or expression of gratitude. It needs to demonstrate that the leadership values the employee, and it needs to be specific about why.

10. Storytelling: Good storytelling captures attention and educates as much as it entertains. From years of making a living as a professional speaker, I know that people don't remember points and facts—they remember the story. The story becomes the mental coat peg people then hang the ideas on. Inspiration comes from hearing inspiring stories that summarize and reinforce the purpose, culture, and important lessons of an organization.

You might use these tools to find that great purpose or idea embedded deep within your company. Or, more practically, you might use them to inspire your employees to work for you. That's just as effective as holding some higher purpose over their heads. Many of us have had that "great boss" who was able to get the most out of us. Why? Because we wanted to do our best for him or her. Of course, I can't be certain, but I can probably guess that that one great boss in your life used one of those tools above to push you to a stage of performance that didn't feel like work. It felt like you were making a difference.